



Buying Clinic

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BUYING CLINIC

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SCANNER MEDIUM AND LARGE FORMAT FILM

WANTED: A FLATBED SCANNER THAT SCANS NEGATIVES

Q I am looking for a flatbed scanner that will also scan film negatives. Most scanners seem to scan only 35mm film. I have many photographs on 120 medium format and 5x4" large format films. I would like a faithful scanner, but do not want to pay the price of a professional one. Do you know if a suitable scanner exists?
Brian Lawrence



can scan 120 medium-format film as well as 35mm, and costs around £160 including VAT. The ability to scan large format is rarer and more expensive, though.

Last month we reviewed two flatbeds that are capable of scanning 35mm, 120 and 5x4" large format film; Epson's Perfection 4990 Photo was the best choice. It costs around £310 including VAT. However, these flatbeds do not provide the same scan quality as a dedicated film scanner.

Epson's F-3200 film scanner produces better results and supports 35mm, 120 and 5x4" film, but costs around £490 including VAT. For more information, see *Labs, Shopper* February 2006.



▲ Some flatbed scanners, such as this Epson Perfection 4990 Photo, can scan medium and large format film as well as 35mm

A It's true most flatbed transparency scanners support only 35mm film and slides, but some are capable of scanning larger film formats. Epson's Perfection 4180 Photo

NOTEBOOK SOUND QUALITY

SOUND ADVICE FOR A NOTEBOOK

Q I have an IBM R50e notebook that I bought a few years ago. I use it for playing DVDs when away from home. Although the picture quality is fine, I'm not satisfied by the sound it produces. It has only one speaker and the sound is feeble, to say the least.

Could you recommend a set of speakers that cannot be drowned out by a bird singing several miles away? I don't need surround sound; just one or two speakers with more

volume. Is it possible to buy speakers that are powered via USB, or do they all need an external power adaptor?
Neil Mortimer

A You can buy travel speaker sets, such as the Philips DGX320, that draw power via USB. The best portable speaker set we've seen, though, is JBL's On Tour. At around £60 including VAT, this little speaker box isn't cheap,



◀ JBL's On Tour speakers are easily portable and sound great

but it does sound excellent. It's built to travel, with a sliding cover to protect its two speakers, and it can be powered using batteries or a mains adaptor. This would be ideal for DVD soundtracks.

MP3 PLAYER STEREO CONNECTION

I WANT AN MP3 PLAYER FOR THE LIVING ROOM

Q I know that there are plenty of portable MP3 players available these days, but is there one made specifically for connecting to your stereo with a touch screen that can be used to access and play your music?

It would be even better if the touch screen could be fitted separately on the wall above the stereo or on a stand.

Steve Clark

A Unfortunately, we haven't seen a single product designed to do this. You could build your own custom MP3 system using a mini-ITX computer and a small touch screen of the type used by in-car computers; see *PC Builder* in *Shopper* February 2006 for details.

Alternatively, you could use a music streaming device such as the Roku SoundBridge, which we reviewed in our wireless media player in *Labs, Shopper* December 2005. This can play music



◀ You could build a touch-screen MP3 player using components more commonly used for in-car PCs

stored on a remote computer. Finally the iRiver U10, reviewed this month on page 41, is a tiny but smart MP3 player. It will sit neatly alongside even the smartest stereo system, but its screen is small.



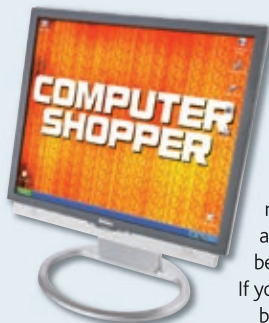
MONITOR INPUTS

DO I REALLY NEED A DIGITAL INPUT?

Q I'm looking to buy a new 19" monitor and am considering one without a digital input. Is this going to make a big difference?

Paul Leith

A Digital Video Interface (DVI) inputs have several advantages over their analogue counterparts. First, as you're transmitting a digital signal to the monitor, you don't have to worry about any adjustments. The monitor is configured automatically to display the perfect picture. With an analogue input, there's an auto adjust button that configures the monitor to display the input. However, you sometimes have



▲ A digital input isn't essential, but you might as well get one if you can

to change settings such as the clock and phase manually or you see shifting patterns onscreen.

That said, once properly configured, analogue inputs work very well. There are often more important things to consider. A monitor with good viewing angles and excellent colour reproduction is better than one with a digital input. If you've seen the monitor you want to buy in operation and you are happy with the picture quality and price, there's no reason not to buy it.

If you're looking for a good-value 19" monitor, Belinea's 101925 (see *Hotlist*, page 31) costs £200 inc VAT and is an excellent choice. It has both analogue and digital inputs.

MP3 PLAYER BROADCASTING

CAN I LISTEN TO MP3s VIA FM?

Q I've seen the iTrip FM transmitter for the iPod, which lets you listen to music on your car stereo without having to plug in any cables. I'd like something similar for my Creative Zen Touch. Is such a device available, and is it legal in this country?

Keith Hutchison

A In most of Europe, you're not allowed to broadcast in FM without a commercial radio licence. Failure to obtain a licence means you will be operating as a pirate radio station, regardless of how far you're transmitting, even if it's only the few metres that the iTrip offers.

UK resellers sell these products with a disclaimer that says you're not allowed to use them in Europe. Belkin's TuneCast II costs £25 including VAT from www.blueunplugged.com, but you use it at your own risk and you can face prosecution if you're caught. The police don't actively try to track down users of these products and the odds of getting caught are slim, but it can happen.

If you're not happy about the risk, using a cassette adaptor or a line-in input on your car stereo is a better bet.



▲ Belkin's TuneCast II lets you play your MP3 player through a stereo by broadcasting in FM, but use in the UK is illegal

NOTEBOOK USB HUB

HELP ME TIDY MY NOTEBOOK MESS!

Q I often use my notebook away from my desk.

When I get home I have to reattach all my devices, including keyboard, mouse and external DVD writer. I've tried to find a docking station, but my notebook doesn't support one. Is there a simple way to deal with this desktop mess?

Marcus Thandie



▲ A USB hub can be used like a docking station for notebook users

A There's an easy answer to your dilemma: USB. Most peripherals connect via USB, so you don't need specialist ports such as a parallel or serial port any more. We recommend Trust's 7 Port USB2 Powered Hub,

which costs just £20 including VAT from www.morecomputers.com.

It sits neatly on the desk and all its ports face forwards. Just plug all your peripherals into the hub, so you've only got a single cable to plug and unplug from your notebook.

If you've got a PS2 keyboard and mouse, you'll have to upgrade to a USB set. Microsoft's Optical Desktop costs £34 inc VAT from www.lamda-tek.com. If you use an external monitor, you'll still have to connect its cable. A great way to make the most of your notebook's display when you're at your desk is to buy a notebook stand. Port's Ergo Station costs £47 inc VAT from www.laptopstands.co.uk. It props your notebook up, so you see its display clearly. It even has a built-in, four-port USB2 hub.

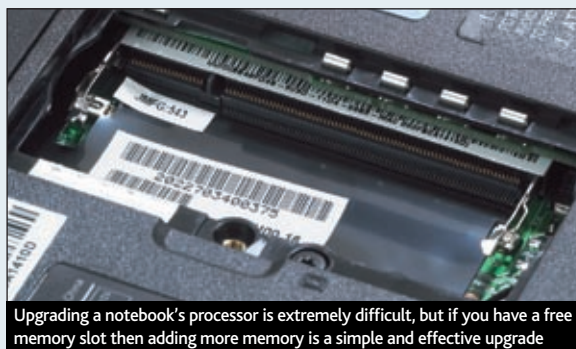
NOTEBOOK PROCESSOR

LAPTOP PROCESSOR UPGRADE REQUIRED

Q I have a Mitac Iqon 8089P notebook with an Intel Celeron M 1.5GHz processor, an Intel 855 chipset, 256MB of memory and Intel integrated graphics. I'm planning to upgrade the processor and memory. Should I upgrade the processor to an Intel Pentium M or an Intel Pentium 4 processor? I don't often play games, but I do need to use powerful applications.

Ben Warner

A We'd recommend upgrading the memory in your notebook computer, but not the processor. Adding a newer, faster processor to a desktop computer can be simple, but performing the same task with a



Upgrading a notebook's processor is extremely difficult, but if you have a free memory slot then adding more memory is a simple and effective upgrade

notebook is complicated. Notebook processors are often tucked away inside the body of the computer

itself, and removing them can involve carefully extracting delicate components.

Your notebook's BIOS may not support a different processor. Even if it does, the case may not be able to remove heat generated by a faster processor. In this worst-case scenario, your computer may overheat, thus causing permanent damage.

Check your notebook's manual to see whether it is possible to add a second memory chip. Adding an extra 256MB of memory often costs less than £50 and will provide a significant boost in performance.